

Shellfish Protection Districts

When pollution closes or threatens shellfish beds in Puget Sound, local governments should take action to protect and restore those waters. One of the best tools available to counties for protecting and restoring shellfish growing areas is Washington state law 90.72 RCW. This law encourages, and in some cases requires, counties to establish shellfish protection districts and programs to curb the loss of productive shellfish beds caused by nonpoint sources of pollution, such as stormwater runoff, failing on-site sewage systems, and runoff from farm animal wastes.

Why create a Shellfish Protection District?

A shellfish protection district gives counties:

- Authority to establish and fund programs to protect and restore water quality in valuable shellfish growing areas.
- Flexibility to determine district boundaries, program services, finance mechanisms and rate structures.
- Flexibility to tailor services to address local water quality needs, including stormwater runoff, onsite sewage systems, farm animal wastes, boater wastes, water quality monitoring and public education.
- Flexibility to finance district services with local tax revenues, rates, charges, fees and public and private grants and loans.
- The law requires counties to create shellfish protection districts and programs within 180 days after shellfish beds are downgraded by the state Department of Health.

When and how should counties create districts?

When should a district be established? The sooner the better. The goal is to take action and prevent the contamination of shellfish. Any action to protect those resources will yield broader benefits associated with clean water.

- A district can be established by the county legislative authority (council or commission) or by a vote of the people in the proposed district.
- Effective education and public involvement are central to the success of shellfish protection districts. The statute recommends including local citizen advisory councils to help prepare and put in place districts and programs.
- Counties can apply for public funds to set up shellfish protection districts. Once established, districts can use revenues to leverage other water quality grants and loans. Projects carrying out shellfish protection programs will receive priority consideration for state water quality financial assistance.
- District activities should be coordinated with other plans and programs (for example, watershed management plans and growth management plans). Districts created in response to shellfish downgrades should be coordinated with shellfish closure response strategies, which are also triggered by shellfish bed downgrades.



What is a Shellfish Protection District?

A shellfish protection district, often called a clean water district, is a geographic service area designated by a county to protect water quality and tideland resources. The district provides a mechanism to generate local funds for water quality services to control nonpoint sources of pollution. The district also serves as an educational resource, calling attention to the pollution sources that threaten shellfish growing waters.

Districts should be established to protect water quality and shellfish beds. If shellfish beds are downgraded, counties are then required to set up districts.

State Partners

As part of the Puget Sound Action Team, the following state agencies are involved in shellfish protection activities:

- Department of Health (shellfish monitoring and classification; onsite sewage management).
- Department of Ecology (water quality protection).
- Department of Fish and Wildlife (tideland resources and harvest management).
- Department of Natural Resources (tideland resources and harvest management).
- State Parks and Recreation Commission (state park tideland resources).
- Department of Agriculture (aquaculture; dairy waste management).
- Conservation Commission (land conservation practices).

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PUGET SOUND ACTION TEAM

P.O. Box 40900 • Olympia • WA • 98504-0900 • (800) 54-SOUND • (360) 725-5444

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For more information, check out the complete text of the Puget Sound plan, additional fact sheets about the update process, and information about the Action Team at www.psat.wa.gov or call the Action Team at (360) 725-5444 or (800) 54-SOUND.

If you need these materials in an alternative format, call our TDD number 1-800-833-6388.